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THE WORK OF WITNESS AND THE PROMISE OF POWER

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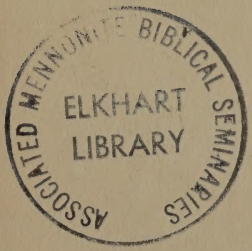
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The Work of Witness
and
The Promise of Power

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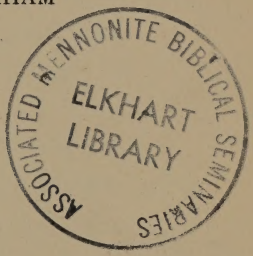
BY THE REV.

HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

VICAR OF CHRIST CHURCH, BECKENHAM

PREFACE BY THE

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM



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To

the memory of

my Mother

whose life on earth

closed

in the year that

the life of

this little book opened

Preface

THIS miniature book, the work of an old Cambridge student and dear friend of mine, carries a weighty message. I commend it, heartily and thankfully, to the reader.

True, there is no subject on which a tender reverence and care of statement is more called for, on some sides, than that of the fulness of the Spirit. But there is no subject more pressing, in its profound importance, for our present needs. May our Master bless this presentation of it to many hearts.

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Prefatory Note to Second Edition

WHEN this little book appeared as a paper in the pages of the *Record,* the late Dean Howell wrote a warm letter urging its issue in a form convenient for general distribution. He, perhaps more than any man of the National Church in Wales, shared in the laying of the train, which was subsequently fired by the Spirit of God in the late revival. An appeal from such a source could not be lightly disregarded, and the following pages are the result.

I am glad to recall that the first hundred copies were purchased and circulated as a New Year's message

by him, shortly before his home-call. The book has been out of print for some little time, but in response to inquiries by friends it is here reissued, after revision and enlargement, with the prayer that the Spirit of God may use it to bring the life-breath of spring into some heart which has been chilled by wintry hopelessness.

"RESTORE UNTO ME THE JOY OF THY SALVATION, AND LET THE BENEFICENT SPIRIT SUPPORT ME (Ps. li. 12, Spurrell)."

H. C. L.

BECKENHAM, 1908.

The Work of Witness
and
The Promise of Power

An Expository Study on the "Fulness of the Holy Ghost" in the Acts of the Apostles

I

THE Book of the Acts may well be called the Gospel of the Holy Ghost. Upwards of fifty times He is mentioned in the twenty-eight chapters. St. Luke in his first volume to Theophilus sets forth "all that Jesus began to do and to teach"; in this, his second volume, he shows how the Holy Spirit, the one true

Vicar of Christ upon earth, continued to "do and teach" what the absent Master had begun. We are reminded that the "Man Christ Jesus" consented to be dependent on the Spirit's power throughout His earthly ministry. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good" (Acts x. 38).[1] And this dependence, while true of His earthly life before the Crucifixion, is maintained even after the Resurrection. His human limitations are wonderfully transformed, yet still it is "through the Holy Ghost" that He gives "commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He showed Himself alive after His Passion" (i. 2).

[1] All references are to the Acts except where otherwise stated.

And when the day of Ascension dawned, and the empty throne by the Father's side, relinquished in self-sacrifice, is resumed in triumph, the Coronation-gift is once more the Holy Ghost Himself. "He received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost" (ii. 33).

From this time the Divine Receiver becomes the great Transmitter—"He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear" (ii. 33). And it is the agency of the Spirit alone which makes Christ's astounding statement possible, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and *greater works than these shall he do*" (John xiv. 12).

In his measure the servant, who is called to do the Master's work, must

receive the Master's equipment. In both St. Luke's volumes this spiritual experience is emphasised as the preliminary of fruitful service. The gospel of Him who was God's Divine "Apostle" (Heb. iii. 1) introduces the wondrous ministry by telling us how He became "full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke iv. 1). And in like manner the "Acts," the gospel of God's human apostles, relates how even the great work of winning the world stood aside, until the words had become true of the servants as of their Master,—"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts i. 4; ii. 4).

II

HOW real a Person was the Holy Spirit to the first Christians! And how closely His presence was bound up with the daily life of the Apostolic Church. When the scripture is quoted, the words are not merely those of David or Isaiah, but "the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake" (i. 16); "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet" (xxviii. 25). When faithful preaching is opposed, the speakers are conscious, not only that they are "His witnesses," but "so also is the Holy Ghost" (v. 32, and cf. John xv. 27). If a lie is told, it is not merely that a man has

been deceived and another deceiving, but that "Satan has filled his heart to lie to the Holy Ghost" (v. 3). If there is a need for foreign work to be undertaken, it is the Holy Ghost who with the voice of divine authority says to the praying Church, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (xiii. 2). And if churches are built up and multiply it is by the "sustaining companionship of the Holy Ghost" (*τῇ παρακλήσει τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος*, ix. 31). If Church-officers are to be chosen, they must not be simply men of business capacity. Are they full of the Holy Ghost? For this is reckoned indispensable, even for the keeping of the Church's accounts and the distribution of her offertories (vi. 3).

We cannot but be painfully conscious

that our Church life to-day, as a whole, falls far short of the Apostolic pattern, which was nevertheless actually lived out by men of like passions with ourselves. We, alas, scarcely mention the blessed Spirit except perhaps as a vague religious influence, and should think it presumptuous to claim His partnership in our pulpit-witnessing. Church-officers are sadly too often chosen solely for their social and financial position, or their business capacity. When we set on foot some new project, we form committees and display much laudable energy; but do we usually wait on God in the matter that we may learn His will?

Except for a collect, or a short prayer, at the beginning, and the Benediction at the close, we often forget to do so, and are tempted to

think time spent in prayer an encroachment upon business. If Church-membership declines, it is to new "attractions" rather than to the reinforcement of the Holy Spirit that we look for the desired improvement.

The fact is that by infinite labour we push the locomotive ourselves, and, all things considered, make fair progress; but if the true motive power were within, we should progress twice as fast with half the expenditure of strain: "Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you" was the closing promise of Christ's ministry on earth (i. 8). "The promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off," said St. Peter on the day of Pentecost (ii. 39).

III

THERE is no trace of evidence in scripture for the common undefined impression that "Holy Ghost power" was intended by God to largely die down and be gradually replaced by human energy. The gifts of miracle-working undoubtedly did pass away,[1] but a reference to Acts i. 8, already quoted, shows that the main purpose of Pentecost was not so much the working of physical wonders,

[1] There is no space here to inquire whether even this was culpably lost, or again whether it may not now be renewable under certain special conditions (see Acts ii. 17, 18, and compare the context in Joel ii.). There are spiritual phenomena, well attested, which make this no question to be entirely evaded or lightly brushed aside.

as the no less miraculous witness of transfigured lives and testifying lips.

Now where lies the defect? Surely herein, — that we are content to believe that the Holy Ghost is present in the Church as a whole, without realising His personal relationship to our individual selves. The Acts offers no such pantheistic theory of the matter at all; it teaches that the individual is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and that the Church is an aggregate of such units knit together by the Spirit. The humblest member, no less than the highest archbishop, may be full of the Holy Ghost; as St. Peter says, "The promise is unto all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The Church, then, cannot be full of the Holy Ghost if her members are empty.

IV

LET us examine, therefore, in some detail what is the teaching of the Acts in regard to this personal fulness of the Spirit.

We have it first represented as a *Distinct Enduement.* It is terribly possible to be a Church-member and even a Church-worker, without enjoying in practice what in theory is intended for every Christian. We do not, to use an expressive Old Testament phrase, "possess our possessions" (Obad. 17). I do not forget that no conversion takes place without the Spirit's work, for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of

His" (Rom. viii. 9); but there were many in Samaria, baptized believers, of whom we are distinctly told that they had not received the Holy Ghost (viii. 16). There were, again, certain men in Ephesus, professing Christians, to whom St. Paul said, "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" (xix. 2). Or, if we may paraphrase it, "There are two great Christian blessings,—personal belief in Jesus Christ, and personal enduement with the Holy Ghost; have you both?" St. Paul's question is utterly pointless if, as many hold, all true believers have in the latter sense "received" the Spirit. He could not have said, "Did ye receive when ye believed?" unless it were possible to "believe" without "receiving the Spirit." Moreover, the objection that

they were only baptized into John's baptism does not touch the point, for St. Paul did not know this until after he had asked the question. He only found out their abnormal status from their reply.[1] This distinct enduement is also at a later date pressed upon the Ephesian converts as an imperative, yet continuous command, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18);

[1] This is proved beyond dispute by the form of the question in the original. The Greek language carefully distinguishes questions which expect the answer "yes," from those which expect the answer "no," by the different particles which it places at the beginning of the sentence. The one used in this passage (εἰ) proves that St. Paul looked for the answer "yes," and unexpectedly received "no" for a reply. Thinking them to be ordinary believers he yet felt it necessary to ask the question, "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?" It proves then two things. 1. That the well-instructed convert should be directed to seek not only the new heart, but the fulness of the Spirit (cf. Acts ii. 38), and *may* receive both together. 2. But if not so instructed, he may claim them at successive stages, as the light is revealed to him.

and above, looking back, apparently to their first entrance into the new experience, he writes: "In whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise" (Eph. i. 13).

V

NEXT, it is represented as a *Definite Experience.*

In chap. ii. 4, we read, "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (ἐπλήσθησαν ἅπαντες, the aorist tense, which indicates a definite act). Again, in ix. 17, Ananias is sent to Saul the new convert, to tell him that the purpose of his call is that he may be filled with the Holy Ghost (ὅπως πλησθῇς, once more the aorist, a well-defined transaction). There was a time in both these cases when, being definite Christians already, they had not yet been filled; and again there was a time when, a crisis having taken

place, they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

The soul which, having become conscious of spiritual incapacity, seeks and finds this promised enduement, does pass, consciously or not, from weakness to power. Peter, the cowardly disciple, realising his duty, yet unable to face all that it involves, becomes, in the experience of Pentecost, the lion-hearted apostle capable of performing God's will. John, the fiery-hearted, burning to call down Divine fire on hostile and prejudiced Samaritans, becomes, under the Spirit's touch, the Apostle of love, breathing the very Spirit of the Master on whose bosom he had leaned. They failed when they attempted to imitate the Divine Copy in their own strength, even when the living example was

before them. They only found the secret of success when the power to reproduce was implanted within them. It was indeed "expedient" that even Christ should go away, if only thus the great Reinforcer might come (John xvi. 7).

VI

AND so we find that the fulness of the Spirit is, thirdly, a *Daily Enjoyment.* The line of Divine supply, having been once established, is daily maintained by faith and prayer; though it may be checked, or choked, by disobedience to God's will, until pardon and restoration have been sought. The normal condition of those who have been "filled" (πλησθέντες) is that they are "full" (πλήρεις). In vi. 3, 5, and vii. 55, we are thrice told of the daily life of Stephen that he was full (πλήρης) of the Holy Ghost; and so in xi. 24, of Barnabas. The vessel, which is

daily and hourly in touch with Divine supply, will naturally be kept full. If we seek and find this same supply, we too may be "full" for the work of parish routine, dull as it often is; daily visiting, with all its difficult problems; private study, with its frequent temptations to follow speculation, instead of revelation; public utterance, with its alternative dangers of self-seeking or man-pleasing. Or if our life-walk be in the midst of what is called "secular," the same Spirit will illumine and sanctify the drudgery of the office, or the monotony of the housework; will guard us from the perils of commercial forgetfulness of God, or the fret of domestic worry.

It may be that we have laid upon our hearts the need of some perplexed

soul: "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near and join thyself to this chariot" (viii. 29). We need guidance when to be silent, as well as when to speak: "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" (viii. 39). Thus does individual intercourse become a means of blessing. Or we are invited to preach to some new congregation; shall we go? "The Spirit said unto Peter, Three men seek thee, arise therefore and go with them" (x. 19). We are suddenly confronted by some difficulty of parish organisation or evangelistic enterprise, and it is no small rest to recognise that the hand which shuts the door is possibly the Holy Spirit Himself: "They essayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not" (xvi. 7). We find here, too,

the remedy for those many inconsistencies, which are often accepted as inevitable by those whom God has called to holiness and victory. The Christian is not to be unnatural; but he is hardly a Christian at all unless his life be supernatural. What a triumphant experience would our Christian life be if we learned that the fruit of the Spirit is love, not bad temper; joy, not depression; peace, not worry; long-suffering, not impatience; mellowness (χρηστότης), not angularity; active goodness, not selfishness; faithfulness, not unreliability; meekness, not self-assertion; Divine control (ἐγκράτεια), not daily defeat (Gal. v. 22, 23)!

The enemy of the soul may indeed, as Bunyan pictured him, cast the cold water of temptation or dis-

couragement upon the upward-leaping flame of the Christian's life; but the unseen Master is waiting and ready to pour continually the holy oil of the Spirit's anointing on the soul, so that, in spite of all, the fire may glow and burn in daily victory.

VII

THE possibility (for this is no dream) seems almost too celestially fair; but there is more yet,—the fulness is also a *Divine Enlargement* in time of emergency. Even the full vessel may sometimes need to be fuller; and this, too, has been provided of God "who has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness." In iv. 8, we find St. Peter facing the antagonistic Jewish Council. He has already the fulness of the Holy Ghost (ii. 4); yet it is written, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost" (πλησθείς). Again, in xiii. 9, St. Paul has an unexpected diffi-

culty in Elymas the sorcerer. He, too, has already received the fulness of the Spirit (ix. 17); nevertheless we read, "Then Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost" (πλησθείς). What does it mean? Surely this, to use the words of Isa lix. 19, that "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." If the output is greater, then the inflow shall be proportionately increased. Every emergency, with its cry for help, may bring an abundant answer to meet the special need. God will with the trial also make the way of escape, that we may be able to bear it.

VIII

THUS the book sketches the brightness of the possibilities, but what are the conditions of attainment? How may we enter into actual experience of this provision of God?

Five conditions appear to be laid down in the book which we are specially studying.

1. *Repentance and remission of sins* (ii. 38).—That break with the past, and entrance into divine relationship,—the death unto sin and the new birth unto righteousness,—the living gift which is, to every believing soul, the fulfilment of the covenant made in Christian baptism, — a conversion

which repents, believes, and confesses Christ.

2. *A cleansed heart.*—" He gave them the Holy Spirit, having purified their hearts by faith " (xv. 9). The state of heart-purity is not merely a matter of pardon for past sins, but a present provision, whereby the inner source from which the evil deeds have sprung is divinely purified, and kept from defilement by habitual maintenance of a reliant attitude; so that the fountain sends forth " sweet water " instead of " bitter " (Jas. iii. 11). Christ can and will transform the tastes and desires, and garrison both hearts and thoughts (Phil. iv. 7). So that while there is no arrogant assumption of sinlessness, which stands automatically condemned as self-deceit (1 John i. 9), yet there is a real joy

and a clearer vision (Matt. v. 8), a new experience of victory in temptation.

3. *An obedient walk.*—"The Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him" (v. 32). Where the deliberate choice has been made to transgress willingly no known law of God, to palter with no doubtful expedients, to pray for further light on holy living, to be honest toward God in self-scrutiny, to bare the heart and life to the searchlight of the Lord's gaze, there the Comforter broods and seeks admission. Obedience at all costs to the revealed will of God is the best welcome to the Holy Ghost.

4. *Earnest prayer.*—"When they had prayed they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (iv. 31). The Heavenly Father gives the Holy Spirit to them

that ask Him, and the soul which seeks the promise of power must wait on the Lord, as the apostles waited, in prayer and supplication. "Wait," that is, not in the sense of delay, but of approach. It is not the persuading of the Lord, but the preparing of the man, which sometimes hinders the full realisation of the blessing.

5. And yet when all these conditions have been, so far as we know, honestly fulfilled, there is often a link still missing, an absence of full light and enabling, as though the circuit of holy power were yet incomplete. And I believe that failure to understand the fifth condition is the frequent cause. "They *received*" (viii. 17): "Did ye *receive*?" asked St. Paul of the Ephesians; "the Spirit which they that believe on Him should *receive*

(John vii. 39). We remind ourselves here that "receive" (λαμβάνειν) means far more than mere willingness on the part of God; it implies the active grasping on man's part of something held out; it is translated "take" in Rev. xxii. 17. And only too often men go on asking, instead of taking the gift which is held out in answer to their prayer, and which has been, as a matter of legal inheritance, theirs to claim from the moment of their new birth in Christ. "They that believe on Him should *take*." To kneel in earnest prayer, and there and then to "take" by an act of faith the gift of the Spirit, without waiting for some wondrous emotion or heavenly rapture; to rise from the knees, and henceforth to reckon the promise not only true but fulfilled; and, stepping

out, actually to find it is true,—this I believe is often the final link in the receiving of the fulness of the Holy Ghost. It may be the experience now of the believer who reads these lines,—repentance and cleansing, dedication and obedience, faithful prayer, and then appropriation, — these are hallowed steps into a Palace Beautiful to-day. The transaction once accomplished is evidently to be daily and hourly maintained: "they kept on taking" (ἐλάμβανον) is written of these Samaritans (viii. 17). The gift once given is to be continually drawn upon. This is also the meaning of the command to the Ephesians, "Keep being filled with the Spirit" (Eph. v. 18).

IX

WHAT will not such an experience work? It would perhaps not be seemly to say much here of personal joy and proving of the lesson learned, though that has indeed been real and lasting; but one historic case from recent missionary history may be adduced in illustration and proof.

In 1893 George Pilkington, of the Church Missionary Society, was working in the Uganda Mission. He was a man of no mean ability,—a scholar, a linguist, and an able Bible translator. The Native Church, brought, through persecution and martyrdom, into great light and rapid development, ap-

peared for some reason to have halted in spiritual growth; there was a haunting sense of barrenness in work, and inconsistency of living, among members of the Church. A little book was placed in the hands of Pilkington while on a short visit to one of the islets of the Victoria Nyanza Lake. The title arrested his attention, "Have you received the baptism of the Holy Ghost?" It became a means of quickening power, altogether fresh, and was overwhelming in its scriptural conviction. Returning to Mengo, the capital, he gathered the workers and quietly unfolded to them the old promise suddenly become new. Within a very short time a marvellous change came over the station. Men who had relapsed began to show, by victory over besetting sin, the new

power they had received. There was growth in holiness and self-sacrifice. Chiefs willingly resigned important positions, to go forth as evangelists into neighbouring kingdoms. Some gained the honourable sobriquet, " The men of the Holy Ghost," and earnest Bible study characterised the whole Church. And when, not long after, the Soudanese troops mutinied, many of these Christian Baganda earned the warm admiration of British officers, for the way in which they helped to quell the rebellion. They loved not their lives, even unto death ; and Pilkington himself, who accompanied them to inspire them, not only by personal encouragement but spiritual ministration, was struck down, and, losing his life for Christ's sake, found it again at His feet.

What is possible in Central Africa is possible in England. The Holy Spirit's power is not limited. It cannot be too strongly insisted upon, that while we can do by ourselves what we can do, He is given to make us do *what we cannot do*. To give power in our work, and guidance in our walk, to impart a secret that may paralyse sin and sloth and worldliness in our lives, and transfigure them into something more like the Apostolic Pattern.

HE BREATHED ON THEM AND SAID, "TAKE YE THE HOLY GHOST"

(John xx. 22).

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